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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH JUNTA'S "FOREIGN
MINISTER"

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador met on September 2 with the junta's "Foreign Minister," Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou at the latter's request. Noting the historically good relations between the United States and Mauritania, Ould Mohamedou hoped that these could continue even under the current "difficult circumstances." Launching into the regime's standard denunciation of President Abdallahi, he characterized the coup as regrettable but necessary, professed understanding for the West's principled position but also pleaded for understanding, help and the avoidance of "confrontation." Calling Mauritanian society fragile and divided, he said that public statements of condemnation and threats of sanctions were not helpful.

¶2. (C) Denying that the USG sought confrontation, Ambassador Boulware said that, with the coup, Mauritania had embarked upon a path that neither the USG nor the international community could accept. He reiterated our demand that President Abdallahi and Prime Minister Waghef be released and restored to their functions and that Mauritania return to constitutional order. Noting that time was extremely short, Ambassador urged that Mauritania accept the hand of friendship extended to them. Insisting that the regime was committed to democracy, Ould Mohamedou asserted that parliament represented the people and could be the vehicle for a return to constitutional order. Ambassador Boulware said that President Abdallahi was the legitimate elected leader of Mauritania and that parliament operating under the shadow of the military junta could not confer a legitimacy that the constitution did not provide. He said the USG understood that the return to constitutional order would not, in itself, resolve all of Mauritania's political problems but that it was an essential point of departure from which to go forward. In response to Ould Mohamedou's plea that the US identify possible options, Ambassador Boulware replied that although AU Commissioner Jean Ping had raised different potential exit strategies with General Aziz there had been no serious Mauritanian response. The Ambassador urged that the AU be seriously engaged and the sooner the better.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Boulware noted that several people had now visited President Abdallahi and said that his own request to visit him still stood. Ould Mohamedou promised to try to arrange a visit. When Ould Mohamedou recalled his positive experiences while living in the US, Ambassador inquired whether he had acquired US citizenship when living there. Ould Mohamedou said that he had but preferred that the fact not be made public. The Ambassador said that he did not intend to do so, but thought that Ould Mohamedou's US

citizenship might make his own situation particularly delicate in view of potential personal sanctions.

¶4. (C) Ould Mohamedou, himself only recently returned from the US, did not radiate confidence during the meeting and seemed unprepared for the firm US response to arguments we have heard all too often already. He seemed particularly unsettled by the inquiry about his US citizenship. We do not expect Ould Mohamedou to play a significant role in the junta government and suspect that his selection was inspired by the hope that his US academic credentials and connections could temper the USG's response to the coup.

Boulware